

# “The Heart of a Holy Woman”

By TIMOTHY BROSNAHAN, S.J.



“A certain woman, named Martha, received Him into her house. And she had a sister, called Mary, who sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard His word.” (St. Luke x, 38, 39.)

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## *“The Heart of a Holy Woman”*

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WE read in Ecclesiasticus, chapter twenty-six, verse twenty-four: “As everlasting foundations upon a solid rock, so the commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman.”

To many these words of Holy Scripture may seem to have been written in a spirit of exaggeration. The instability of woman’s heart has become a commonplace of literature. Wit and wisdom have pooled their issues in an effort to make it a truism, which all who study mankind must respect. Essayists in many a well-built period have made the assertion of it gems of literature. To it historians have traced the downfall of statesmen and of kingdoms. Philosophers from calm heights have attempted to analyze it. Moralists have earnestly warned us against it. The ephemeral and hebdomadal newspaper humorists have found it inexhaustible grist for their mills and many a poet, whose eyes were, for one reason or another, rolling in find phrensy, has made it the theme of his song. The instability of woman’s heart is the motive of many a drama, the moral of many a tale, the point of many a joke. It has become a proverb, a parable, and a pleasantry. That the heart of any woman, therefore, holy or otherwise, should be likened to the solid rock of an everlasting foundation seems gross flattery on the part of the son of Sirach.

Nor can it be denied that he gave utterance to a

strong assertion. I doubt if stronger may be found in Holy Writ. We are told that nothing is so stable, so firm and so immoveable in righteousness as that which is usually taken as a type of instability. Theology teaches us that, outside of some exceptional cases, only those who enjoy the Beatific Vision, and those who await in purgation their predestined admission to it, are so confirmed in grace that they cannot fail. As long as we are wayfarers in this probationary world of faith, we must pick our steps along the pathway of life with the ever present conviction that we may stumble and fall. Yet inspired Wisdom tells us that the heart of a holy woman is as enduring a support for the commandments of God as is a solid rock for everlasting foundations.

The text which I have cited attributes therefore to woman an aptitude for righteousness that is truly exceptional. On its truth depends, I think, the solution of some practical question of the highest moment. Is it true then that woman may possess the extraordinary stability in righteousness that will make her heart the impregnable stronghold of God's commandments? If it is, her power for good or for evil is almost immeasurable. This is the question I wish to submit to your consideration this evening.

### THE SPHINX

There is a Greek legend of a fabled being, half-woman and half-lion, called the Sphinx, who dwelt beside a profound abyss and had as her only visible means of support a riddle concerning man. This she proposed to all who came into her presence and then devoured those who failed to answer it. As the number of those

who are confident that they can solve any problem and are eager and anxious to attack the most momentous is always large and immeasurably in excess of those who are capable of solving any, this leonine maiden is said to have been for unnumbered years in no want of food. At last however, when the riddle was solved, she threw herself into the abyss and was destroyed. A German poet with some glimmering of wisdom has said that every age has its sphinx which plunges into the abyss as soon as its problem is solved; and it is undoubtedly true that in every epoch of history mankind is confronted with a problem affecting its well-being, and on the right solution of which depend the future advance and welfare of the race. This problem on the surface differs for different ages; the social problems of today are not the problems of the fifteenth, the tenth, the fifth or the first century of the Christian era. But this difference is more apparent than real. In their last analysis the social questions of every age, whether they concern liberty, wages, education or morality are one. Our ancestors had their riddles to solve, and our descendants shall have theirs, as we have ours; but ours differ from those of the past and the future only in some accidents. At bottom the problems of the Sphinx of time resolve themselves into the general one of so regulating and controlling human conduct, of so adjusting and harmonizing the mutual relations of man with man that justice and equity, peace and friendship may prevail, that each and all may enjoy the largest and most far-reaching happiness compatible with the limitations of our present existence and the fairest field for endeavor and enterprise. That men may enjoy liberty without allowing it to de-

generate into license; that governments may exercise authority without attempting the tyranny of paternalism; that the basis and foundation stone of society, the homes of a virtuous people, may be secure in the sunlight of peace and contented in an atmosphere of prosperity; that mutual reverence, charity and tolerance may prevail universally—this is the goal mankind has been attempting to attain in every age, this the aim of the statesman's philosophy and endeavor, this the problem of the sphinx of time.

Now there is one and only one solution for the question proposed by the sphinx of this or any other epoch. It was first proposed about five thousand years ago on the summit of Mount Sinai; and since the Son of Sirach was not indulging in oriental flattery the heart of a woman is the most effective instrument for working out that solution.

Other solutions have been proposed in our times, through which we are promised panaceas for all the ills that afflict society. Prominent among these are dismal philosophies, raw and indigested legislation, and what is commonly known today as education.

#### DISMAL PHILOSOPHY

Among these dismal philosophies there is one which is the parent of all the others and through its offspring has infested almost every department of human thought; a philosophy, which owes its origin to Darwin, who as Ruskin tells us "has a mortal fascination for all vainly curious and idly speculative persons, and has collected in the train of him every impudent imbecility of Europe, like a dim comet wagging its useless tail of phosphor-

escent nothingness across the steadfast stars"; a philosophy which in its ultimate analysis destroys all morality, all nobility of life, and all refinement of social intercourse, which declares God an obscure and nebulous background behind the world of phenomena, and makes man the brother of the ass, the ape and the tiger.

But the sphinx of time will not accept as a solution of its problem a philosophy which makes God more unknown than an algebraic symbol, which degrades righteousness to the level of expediency and utility, which declares man to be an irresponsible and selfish automaton, and his life a gross, heartless and egotistic struggle for existence. It has always insisted on having a solution in keeping with the facts of man's nature and destiny.

#### UNDIGESTED LEGISLATION

In our democratic age a mighty efficiency is attributed by some to legislation. The number of sincere men and women who believe that injustice and vice may be legislated out of existence is a striking proof that goodness and common sense are not correlative terms. If they succeed in getting our lawgivers to enact prohibitions and to assign sanctions for violations, they glow with the enthusiasm of an apostle who has converted a nation. They forget that the statute books are filled with laws and ordinances; that laws are worthless for personal morality unless broad-based on a people's will. Legislative enactments have the vitality of laws properly so called, when they are the expression of a people's moral standards. A simple experiment in hydrostatics shows that water in two communicating vessels will not rise higher in one than in another. The reservoir

of national and municipal morality must increase in depth before we may hope for an increase in height in the fountains of justice. Laws therefore, necessary though they be, derive their moral efficiency from the interior law that rules the heart.

### THE EDUCATION NOSTRUM

Education is another of our nostrums. A notion prevailed in medieval times that knowledge of the forces of nature necessarily implied intercourse with the powers of darkness. It seems to us who have pried so successfully into the material secrets of nature without any aid from his satanic majesty that this notion is ludicrous. But we moderns have a superstitious notion of our own ; we fancy that education has in itself something Divine. A very ancient woman had the same conviction when she purchased the knowledge of good and evil by the loss of Eden. Some new women and old men are untiring in their efforts to propagate the belief that increased development of the intellectual powers together with increased knowledge is going to cure the ills of society, to restrain the passions of men, to make the lion lie down with the lamb and perhaps even make the "bulls" and the "bears" clasp one another in a loving financial embrace. We have engrossed this superstition of ours in letters of gold beneath the vaulted vestibule of our imposing national library. We have somehow reached the conviction that because education is a powerful and necessary ally it is the leader that directs and inspires the forces of social order and morality ; that because it is an embellishment and a strength to our social and individual lives it is the force that gives vitality.

Who loves not knowledge? Who shall rail  
Against her beauty? May she mix  
With men and prosper. Who shall fix  
Her pillars? Let her work prevail.

But Tennyson continues:

What is she cut from love and faith  
But some wild Pallas from the brain  
Of Demons? Fiery hot to burst  
All barriers in her onward race  
For power. Let her know her place.  
She is second not the first;  
A higher hand must make her mild  
If all be not in vain; and guide  
Her footsteps, moving side by side  
With Wisdom, like the younger child.

The thing we denominate education today has freed itself from the control of that higher hand. Religion, the fostering mother of morality, reverence, purity, self-control and those other virtues that make childhood and youth lovable and radiant of promise for future womanhood and manhood, has since the unhallowed days of Horace Mann been banished from our public schools. This solemn folly of maintaining that morality is to be advanced, society is to be renovated, the state is to be supplied with good citizens by schools over the portals of which is written the legend—*Leave religion behind all ye who enter here*—may compete as a superstition very successfully with any exploded nonsense of the Middle Ages.

## THE REAL SAFEGUARD

But, there is another power for the safety or renovation of society, which, because it can win men's hearts by its beauty and rule men's minds by its truth, can mould and fashion conduct; which, because it can present the highest rewards and the noblest ideals, can restrain and soften his passions for low rewards and ignoble ideals; which, because it alone can give with authority standards of conduct that appeal to the best that is in man and to the whole man, because it alone can give any satisfactory solution of the problem of his present existence, the riddle of the Sphinx of time, will supply the interior law that will give justice and efficacy to legislation, and the higher hand that prevents knowledge from becoming a wild Pallas from the brain of Demons.

Morality and religion are the safeguard of society. Not the godless schoolhouse but the home over which a Christian mother presides is the seminary of good citizens; not the halls of legislation, but the temple of the living God is the source of effective law. It is not by dismal philosophies, that men are to be ennobled, and society to be elevated, nor by legislation, nor by secularized education; but by the observance of the Ten Commandments, and the loving and faithful inculcation of them by her who lives them and to whom the God of nature and Christianity has committed the formation of our first moral judgments.

If therefore an age, in which the full and unqualified observance of God's commandments is regarded as an iridescent dream, will ever be looked back upon as the

nightmare of a materialized century; then to her, whose heart is capable of becoming an everlasting foundation for the commandments of God, is attributed a power we cannot exaggerate. If the poet's dream of the reign of righteousness and justice, when "all men's good shall be each man's rule, and universal peace lies like a shaft of light across the land and like a lane of beams athwart the sea, through all the circles of the golden year" is ever to be realized, then on her who can hasten that day is imposed a duty which becomes startling in the responsibility it implies.

It may seem that I have wandered somewhat afield from my subject. But my wandering has had a purpose. If by this preamble I have succeeded in presenting the problem and making it of interest, I shall make no apology for its length, but proceed to investigate the truth of my text: "As everlasting foundations upon a solid rock, so the commandments of God in the heart of a holy woman."

### THE MYSTERY IN GENESIS

Before doing so, I ask you to notice the curious mystery that is hidden in the narrative of Genesis describing the creation of our first parents. Two points in that narrative cast a side-light on our subject that is strange, coming as it does in the oldest historical record and in the first pages of revelation. Notice in the first place the contrast between the creation of man and woman. We are told that the "Lord God formed man out of *the slime of the earth*, and breathed into his face the breath of life and man became a living soul"; but woman He formed not from the slime of the earth, but from the body of man

after it had been elevated to the supernatural state. *He* is formed out of the slime of the earth, *she* from the bone of his supernaturalized body. Notice in the second place God's purpose in the creation of woman: she was to be man's helpmate. Not, be it understood, in a temporal and material sense only; but for attaining the purpose of his creation. She must be his counsellor and comforter; she must encourage him when he is weak, reanimate him when he falls; she must be his better self, his inspiration, and his ideal.

#### WOMAN IN PAGANISM

If we turn now to history for a realization of the magnificent prophecy implied in the primal structure and mission of woman, we are confronted with a record, some pages of which are gloriously illumined with achievements of duty and heroism, and some are blazoned with deeds of humiliation, degradation and infamy.

The condition of woman throughout paganism is one of dishonor. Her influence is for evil. In the home—if home, in our sense of the word, it may be called—she exercised little of that tender control over the formation of the character of her boys, which we associate with the functions of a mother. She was usually excluded from the public life of society. She was degraded by polygamy and divorce, and reduced to the position of being little less than the chattel and the slave of man. Frederic Ozanam says:

When she sought to free herself from the pressure of this harsh destiny; when by the publicity of her charms or the brilliancy of her mental gifts, she endeavored in her turn to subjugate

warriors, statesmen, philosophers and artists, she only succeeded in making them sharers in her degradation. When she had become the mistress, she found in this name only another species of shame.

Why dwell on the unsavory story! Woman, whose creation was so exceptionally glorious in the promise of good, was in Paganism an universal source of evil.

If we remember that it is a woman who brings us into the world, whose moods, and temperaments and thoughts may help to the formation of character even in the days of our prenatal existence; that it is a woman who is our first teacher, in whose care and power we are during the most plastic years of our life; if we remember that unlike other teachers she has the unbounded love and reverence of her pupil, that she is looked up to as a divinity by the loyal young hearts and heads which she is forming; that in all the wide range of human influence there is no opportunity like hers—bearing all this in mind and much else that might be added, we shall not be surprised at the inference of a celebrated modern writer. "Woman," he says, "makes the world what it is from century to century." *Therefore woman made Paganism.* The corruption of that ancient world began at the domestic hearth.

Now at first sight, it may seem that what I have said regarding woman's part in the degradation of humanity under paganism is an argument against the truth enunciated in the book of Ecclesiasticus. If the debasement of ancient civilization is largely attributable to woman, one might conclude that woman is not capable of such power and influence as Holy Writ concedes her.

Nevertheless the inference would not be just. Great powers for good connote great powers for evil; and reciprocally those, who have swayed men by the evil of their lives, might, had they directed their energies into nobler channels, have hastened on the golden year. The great minds and wills that have been the bane of humanity, might have been its benefactors and saviors. On the other hand it has been said that if St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis Xavier had not become great saints, they might have become heresiarchs before whom Luther and Calvin would have paled. If the Lord had not grasped Saul of Tarsus by the heartstrings and dragged him into the Church, Saul would, humanly speaking, have strangled the Church in its infancy. If Judas had not fallen he would have left a name as symbolic of heroic sanctity as it now is of unutterable infamy. St. Theresa herself has acknowledged that if she had not been a fervent religious she would have been a reprobate. There is an old scholastic axiom: *corruptio optimi est pessima*—"the corruption of what is best results in what is most evil." The depths therefore to which woman fell during Paganism, shows the heights she might have attained. The influence she exerted for the degradation of mankind, shows the influence she might have exerted for its elevation.

#### OLD TESTAMENT WOMEN

Let us turn now to the brighter pages of history pages suffused with the light of revelation. There we shall find women who satisfy the requirements of the mother of King Lamuel (Proverbs xxxi. 10-31).

Who shall find a valiant woman? Far and from the uttermost coasts is the price of her. The heart of her husband trusteth in her. . . . She will render him good, and not evil, all the days of her life. . . . She hath opened her hand to the needy, and stretched out her hands to the poor. . . . Strength and beauty are her clothing and she shall laugh in the latter day. She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue. . . . Her children rose up, and called her blessed; her husband, and he praised her. Many daughters have gathered together riches; thou hast surpassed them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain; the woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised.

Were I to attempt an historical confirmation of my text; this lecture would develop into an analysis of the lives of all the holy women of the Old Testament, to whom, because of their holiness and the fortitude and wisdom that comes as a dowry of holiness, were committed enterprises of great peril and moment; and the rising sun would find you tomorrow sitting here, reading an unfinished story. I doubt whether your patience would stand the strain of listening even to the praises of woman for so long a time.

Yet it would be pleasant to corroborate the words of Ecclesiasticus by a detailed exposition of the gentle Rachel's story, for whom Jacob wisely served the seven years which seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love—Rachel who was the mother of Joseph, and such a mother she must have been to have moulded the character of such a son.

The wise Deborah, to whom, seated under a palm-

tree between Rama and Bethel in Mount Ephraim, the children of Israel came for all judgment. When Jabin, the king of Chanaan, sent Sisara, the general of his army, against the children of Israel, it was Deborah's strong wisdom that saved them. She called Barac, the captain of the forces of Israel, and ordered him to go against the enemies of God with ten thousand fighting men; and when that valiant hero refused to go, unless this woman would go with him, she went indeed, but predicted that, because of the cowardice of the man, the victory would not be attributed to him, but to Jahel, Haber's wife, into whose merciless hands Sisara would be delivered.

Strong Judith by one brave deed frustrated the rage of the Assyrian King. When Holofernes came at the command of Nabuchodonosor to punish the people of Israel for refusing to recognize his sovereignty, it was not through the instrumentality of the captains of Israel, but by the means of a woman armored in her saintliness, and following the inspiration of God that Israel was saved from the vengeance of brute force. While the captains of Israel were cowering in fright behind their walls in the presence of their multitudinous enemies; while all the people—the old men, the women, the young men and children—were terror-stricken, and weeping and in lamentation; when they were on the point of capitulating to the enemy of God, Judith in the weakness of her womanhood and the strength of her saintliness routed armies that had met no obstacles in their triumphant marches over the ruins of nations.

The heroic mother of the Macchabees (2 Mach. vii, 20, 21) beheld her seven sons tortured and slain in one

day, and "bore it with good courage for the hope she had in God: and she bravely exhorted every one of them in her own language, being filled with wisdom and joining a man's heart to a woman's thought." When the tyrant Antiochus brought her youngest son—the one on whom a mother seems to focus the concentrated love she might have shared with sons that were never born—and asked her to counsel the boy to save his life by violating the Mosaic law; this mother, with the man's heart and woman's thought, bending herself towards her son, said:

My son, have pity on me that bore thee nine months in my womb, and gave thee suck three years and nourished thee and brought thee into this age. I beseech thee, my son, look upon heaven and earth and all that is in them, and consider that God made them out of nothing, and mankind also. So thou shalt not fear this tormentor; but being made a worthy partner with thy brethren receive death, that in that mercy I may receive thee again with thy brethren.

She accepted a second widowhood, the widowhood of childlessness, which every widowed mother can testify is more grieved than the first. The commandments of God found in her heart "the everlasting foundations upon a solid rock." She endured seven living martyrdoms lest any of her sons, as might have happened had they not been supported by a woman's power, should lack the courage to endure one. Many a mother would sacrifice her life for her sons; it is a pure, a noble and a brave mother who would sacrifice her sons for God.

## THE VIRGIN MOTHER

But it was the advent of Christianity that brought woman the normal opportunities of exercising her powers. Outside of or beyond Christianity she prospered as a rich poisonous flower, retaining her attraction but filling the atmosphere with the deadly aroma of sin. In the pagan world "between the servitude and blameworthy empire to which I have referred there was no refuge for her except in the recesses of the Temple under the veil of virginity; among the priestesses and vestals." She could secure her womanhood only by isolation from society and the loss of her impress on the broader relations of men. The woman was saved but the mother was lost. Among the Gentiles some traditional memory may have partially preserved the old oracle which had announced the intervention of a virgin in the redemption of the world; but lost the truth that this virgin would be a mother also.

When the prophecy of Isaias, foretelling that a virgin should conceive, and bear a son, was verified, the whole human race was rehabilitated; because she, whose condition is the gauge and measure of the race's rise and fall, was elevated to the highest pinnacle of created excellence. When she whom we call the Litany, the Morning Star, first appeared as a herald of the rising Sun of Justice, there was realized here on earth, in flesh and blood, a living ideal of womanhood—an ideal in whom was found the two essential elements of an ideal: first an exemplar or pattern of perfection, and secondly, a beauty, the magnetic attraction of which impels almost irresistibly to effort at attainment. Every true ideal must present

to the mind a perfection, as the aim of endeavor, and must fire the heart with desire for attainment.

That ideal of womanhood has turned the stream of centuries out of the channel it had occupied for four thousand years; has leavened all literature with purity; has refined arts by new and Divine themes; and has tended to make laws just, and government humane, and manners gentle. Probably in nothing more strikingly than in art has the change wrought by that ideal been told. What is the ideal of pagan art in its highest phases?—The physical beauty of Venus, the Goddess of Lust. What is the ideal of Christian Art? The purity of the Madonna, the spiritual beauty of the Mother and the Child. You have the whole story in that contrast. Is it strange then that this ideal of womanhood, this blessed vision of virginal purity and of sweet motherhood has not only changed the condition of woman, but has remade her standards, her aims, her aspirations; has given her thoughts the breadth of heaven and depth of its blue translucent sky; has not only freed her from servitude to man; but has fundamentally refashioned all man's convictions? Is it strange that she "our tainted nature's solitary boast," the highest and holiest womanhood should have been so mighty an influence, though she wrote no books, made no discoveries in science, though outside of one short poem we have little record of what she said? The greatest powers for the good of man, it has been said, have been the most silent. They have produced their effects by the strength and fitness of their resources. "Forces that are illimitable in the compass of their effects are generally obscure and untraceable in the steps of their movements. For instance

what eye can follow the increments of vegetable growth, the slow upheaval of continents, the measured progress of the sun across sky. They work like the coming of the dawn. Who can detect the separate fluxions of its advance?" Gravitation again, that works without a holiday forever and searches every corner of the universe, what eye can follow it to its fountains? And yet stronger and more elusive than gravitation, more sacred than the fluxions of the shadow on a sundial, stealthier than the growth of a forest has the beauty, the nobility, the charm and the holiness of the peerless Virgin Mother worked to the domestic, social and religious elevation of woman and therefore of humanity. By the Divine maternity of a Virgin was woman lifted from her especial degradation and destined to become the latent force giving vitality to civilization. In her degradation she pulled humanity down, in her elevation she lifted it up.

### THE CHRISTIAN WOMAN

Thereafter society felt the quickening pulse of a new life and the home took on a new character, yielding to the gentle but potent influence of the holy house at Nazareth. In civil life woman continued it is true outside of man's sphere, but her own sphere has been enlarged. She does not actively take part in legislation, but she moulds manners which are of greater weight than laws, and to which laws owe their origin and efficacy. She holds the initiative in education on which the future of any society depends. Man educates the world, but woman educates man. From her throne beside the hearth she exercises a sway over the present

citizens and forms the manhood of the future one. Her ideals rule the sacred ministry of alms, and presides over the alleviation of suffering. Her homes for the poor and aged, her hospital for the sick and diseased have established standards of social activity to which the world attempts to conform. Three domains of human life, childhood, suffering and poverty, that is to say the largest part of humanity, acknowledge her unquestioned ascendancy and authority.

Similar changes took place in the family circle. The home became the dearest and most sacred thing on earth. The slave became what Genesis tells us she was created to be—a helper, a councillor, and a comforter. The mother sits among her children, the queen of the Kingdom of Home. Under her gentle rule and high ideals the boy and youth and maiden grow in grace as well as in years. Nor is her influence confined to the family circle. The consciousness that they could not look unabashed into the eyes of her whom they reverence more than all else on earth, if they should forget abroad the purity of home, has kept many a boy and girl from dangerous paths. The ideal wife exercises a pious apostolate in regard to her husband. No true man returns at twilight to the sanctity of a home over which a true woman presides, without departing next morning with nobler purposes. His return thither each evening—like his approach at stated intervals to the sacrament of penance—prevents him from falling into utter materialism. Sisters are guardian angels to their brothers and idealizing seraphs to their fathers. And the vestals of paganism have been transformed into the spouses of Christ.

One may say that henceforth nothing great was to be accomplished within the bosom of the Church without some woman participating in the deed. First they stood as bravest martyrs in the amphitheatre, they shared with the anchorites the possession of the desert, with philosophers the defence of Christianity, and with missionaries the propagation of the Faith. St. Catherine held the wisest enthralled by the wisdom of her lectures in the school of Alexandria. When Constantine set up the labarum at the Capitol, St. Helena planted the cross on the ruins of Jerusalem. While the tears and prayers of Monica were redeeming the soul of the great Augustine, Nonna was forming the young heart of Gregory Nazianzen, and Jerome was supported physically and spiritually in his labor of translating the Vulgate by the devotion of Paula and Eustochia. St. Basil and St. Benedict, the first legislators of the cenobitic life in the West, were aided by their sisters, Macrina and Scholastica. St. Clotilda made France the eldest daughter of the Church. Bertha the great granddaughter of Clotilda introduced Christianity into the pagan court of Canterbury and prepared the way for the landing of St. Augustine and his forty missionaries on the island. Later the Countess Matilda upholds with her chaste hands the tottering throne of Gregory VI.; the wisdom of Queen Blanche rules throughout the reign of St. Louis; Joan of Arc, a village maiden, leads old soldiers to battle and saves France; Isabella of Castile with a woman's wisdom discards the wisdom of learned men and presides over the discovery of a new world. In times nearer to our own we see St. Theresa standing amid the Doctors and Bishops of the Church and founders of religious

orders an acknowledged leader of that revival by which the reformation of society was accomplished. And if we turn to our own country can we ever forget the saintly story of Mrs. Seton, to whom in this new world Archbishop Carroll entrusted the task which St. Vincent de Paul had first committed to Louise de Marillac, of enriching the Church of America with the coronets of Charity, or the steadfast endurance of the gentle Alice Lalor, through whose noble self-sacrifice Archbishop Neale transplanted in Georgetown the spirit of Madame de Chantal; or the heroic courage of Mother Julia, who joining a man's heart to a woman's thought, has laid almost within the shadow of the Catholic University of your Church the foundations of a home of learning, wherein Catholic maidens may hereafter drink deep from the fountain of human knowledge unsullied by the slime of evil?

But the fear lest I trespass too far on your kindness and patient attention forbids me from exposing in detail the silent, humble and unknown heroism of that vast multitude of Catholic women who in every station of life and unconsciously and almost unnoticed working for the glory of God and His Church. It would be pleasant if time permitted to tell of the high positions held by woman till the Reformation in Universities, in the evangelical works of the Church, in society and in the home, to dwell lovingly on her influence in medieval times, which softened and refined and elevated the manners and moderated the effervescence of wild barbaric blood coursing through the veins of knight and soldier. Has woman ever won a triumph comparable to the creation of medieval chivalry? The word is yet found in our vocabu-

laries, but "the age of chivalry is gone." It vanished when the reformation of religion began in Germany with the degradation of a woman consecrated to God and in England by the degradation of a wife. To quote Burke again but with a qualification:

Never, never more [until the Catholic Church with its reverence for the Virgin Mother of God shall govern men's thoughts] shall we behold the generous loyalty to rank and sex, that proud submission, that dignified obedience, that subordination of the heart, which kept alive, even in servitude itself the spirit of an exalted freedom. The unbought grace of life, the cheap defence of nation, the nurse of manly sentiment and heroic enterprise is gone. It is gone, that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honor, which felt a stain like a wound, which inspired courage, whilst it mitigated ferocity, which ennobled all it touched, and under which vice itself lost half its evil by losing all its grossness.

#### THE SOURCE OF POWER

To what shall we attribute this power of woman, where shall we find the secret of her influence?

A question this of some importance today, when woman with false ideals are publicly clamoring—a most unwomanly thing—for broader opportunities and wider spheres; and mayhap in her quest for these, is neglecting the opportunities that are hers exclusively and is endeavoring to escape the sphere that she alone can fill, which if unfilled tells the extinction of womanhood and announces the spectre of a new paganism for humanity. If we can discover the hidden springs of the power

wielded by the noblest exemplars of womanhood, we inferentially determine the sphere in which she may attain her proper and therefore her highest development.

Nor need we institute an elaborate psychological analysis or a lengthened historical investigation to solve the question. Reverting to our text, we shall find in it an answer to our query more profound than that afforded by the theories of any philosophy. Two things the Son of Sirach intimates will give stability and endurance and perpetuity to the race's well-being: The heart of woman and the commandments of God. Love and sanctity, these two, when conjoined have been and are the upbuilders of humanity.

Mr. Marion Crawford has said: "Men have stronger arms and heads for harder work, but they have no such hearts as women." "And the world has been led by the heart in all the ages." It is very true. Mind discovers the goal of the world's endeavor, discovers too the means to attain it. But truth never appealed to any one unless invested with something that touched the heart. The cold, absolutely demonstrated truths of mathematics have never impelled men to action. Truth to be inspiring must stir those finer emotions which we attribute to the heart. The mind lights the way, but the heart is the motive power. Truth is the central sun around which the planets revolve, but love is the moral gravitation, the strong invisible bond that keeps them in their predestined orbs and prevents them from wandering darkly, and to their mutual harm through the immeasurable reaches of space. Bare truth of itself has never roused an emotion, never inspired an heroic purpose; never created an enthusiasm. Unless clothed with

beauty—which, to use Plato's definition, is “the resplendence of truth”—it is as powerless to move the composite beings that constitute humanity to great deeds, nay, even to little deeds, as a proposition of geometry. Nor is there any need of dwelling on the fact that love is the motive power of the world, for even those who would use men for selfish or unholy purposes take care to discover what will secure their hearts.

But a great motive power is capable of great harm unless directed and controlled. It may be abused, degraded and perverted. How vast may be its agency for evil paganism witnesses. Mankind driven by this fundamental power of nature was like some great ocean racer possessing powerful propellers but wanting a pilot. Without a guiding and controlling force the human race by the very strength of this fundamental power was driven into the soul sea of paganism; and thereupon—

On that hard pagan world disgust  
And secret loathing fell;  
Deep weariness and sated lust  
Made human life a hell.

Love is the motive power by which humanity is driven across the ocean of time towards the shores of final perfection: but to reach those shores it must have a pilot that reads in the commandments of God the bearings of its course. That pilot is holiness. Holiness and all that it implies, how gracefully it becomes a woman. It seems to be her especial dowry. How pervasive the influence of her faith, her hope and her charity. How silently and unobtrusively do the counsel and wisdom of a holy woman work; how effectively the courage, the

kindliness, the self-restraint, the patient endurance, the modesty, the truthfulness and purity of intention produce their lasting results! How incongruous, grotesque and disastrous the relations existing between a mother wanting in holiness and the innocence of childhood! How full of malign results for a son or daughter, are the years they have spent in an atmosphere of love that had worldliness, vanity and unholiness for its pilot; whose young minds never felt the fertilizing warmth of the saintliness of a holy mother. We so easily forget that the children of today, who float like butterflies with cheerful joyousness along the current of time, will be, when we shall have finished our course, the struggling humanity of tomorrow. Will their future activity cause this republic to decay and crumble, to cease to be the last realization of men's hopes, the pride of good men's hearts and the ideal of just men's thoughts? Go ask her to whose care has been committed the formation of those future citizens. Let those women ask themselves who are fostering by their apathy or by their false views of life two evils which strike at the root of society, which frustrate the essential functions of society, they who tolerate the divorce courts, they who laud as an ideal a schoolhouse, college or university which they have dubbed non-sectarian, in order if possible to hide behind a hazy word of fact that they know to be an evil.

The newspapers tell us daily sad tales of children being carried to divorce courts in order to bear witness to the unexemplary marital relations of those whom nature intended to be the guides of their unexperienced footsteps, the guardians of their unsullied souls, the models of their young activity. Then poor human jus-

tice commits to the care of one or other of those, who could not take care of themselves, the care of formation of the most delicate thing that God has created—the soul of a child. And sometimes the actors in this drama of successive polygamy lose, it seems, neither social standing, nor repute in what by a curious figure of speech, is called good society; and yet good society is ruled by those whose hearts were made to be everlasting foundations for the commandments of God.

Again, a Report of the U. S. Commissioner of Education reveals to us the fact that those institutions for the higher education of young men and young women are best patronized, which do not pretend to exercise more than a perfunctory supervision over the religious and moral development of their wards; which either give no formal teaching in these fundamental requisites of education; or make them elective studies, which the records of some of these institutions show, by another curious figure of speech, to be a term synonymous with "neglected studies." Now the Presidents of these institutions are primarily business men, whose purpose is to cater to the taste of the public. How long therefore would this condition of affairs last, if the mothers who had guarded their boys and girls in righteousness while at home, should refuse to patronize such institutions? These conditions could never have obtained, if she to whom the virtue of her daughter and the true manliness of her son were dearer than all else, had kept unshaken the everlasting foundations of God's commandments, if her heart had been wise, unworldly, and virtuous.

In conclusion therefore, we must recognize that the power of woman is nearly illimitable, and that her re-

sponsibility is fearful. It is no mere masculine prejudice that places on Eve such large responsibility for our ruin. She the helper, not fashioned from the slime of the earth, had a power for unknown good which she turned to evil. Boundless therefore is woman's power for good or evil, irresistible is her influence, appalling is her responsibility. Whether the women of this Republic and the Catholic women of this country are aware of this, I leave to you to decide, contenting myself with remarking that no people ever truly progressed without morals; that morals are the work of woman; and that "as everlasting foundations upon a solid rock so the commandments of God in the heart of a *holy* woman."



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